Reads to educate, challenge and entertain

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Body

Early spring can be a tough in-between time with no hard winter activities nor any warm weather ones. However, it is a good time to engage in some reading, both fiction and non-fiction, written on themes of environmental and climate destabilization.

Non-Fiction

American Wolf: A True Story

of Survival and Obsession

by Nate Blakeslee

"American Wolf" reads like a movie script.

The last wolf in Yellowstone National Park had been killed in 1926. The elk population, with its natural predator eliminated, boomed and caused severe environmental damage. In 1995 Canadian wolves were brought to Yellowstone in the hopes that they would establish territory inside the park, breed and restore balance.

This book is the story of the world's most famous wolf, O-Six, as well as the cast of characters studying her and her family. It is an intimate portrait of the loving, humanlike relationships that govern wolves in the wild as observed by a dedicated group of watchers.

It's also the story of how science gets sacrificed to politics and it begs the question of which predator is more dangerous, wolves or humans.

Climate: A New Story

by Charles Eisentstein

In most of the world it's not the skeptics who are the biggest obstacle to climate action; it's the indifference of the general public and the political class. The real motivator will be something local, something doable, something personal.

Climate health depends on the health of local ecosystems. Eisenstein compares the earth and its systems to the human body. Take a little piece of the liver, a little of the heart, a morsel of brain and slowly, but eventually, the entire system breaks down and death occurs.

He argues that our worldview holds other beings as less sentient; beasts are beasts, dirt is dirt, all undeserving of empathy and only valuable in monetary terms.

Every aspect of society, the economy and the political system must come into alignment with a new story. This comprehensive and rich book combines science, philosophy, economics and psychology.

Finding the Mother Tree:

Discovering the Wisdom

of the Forest

by Suzanne Simard

This book is a combination of memoir, science, discovery and wonder. Author Simard grew up in the British Columbia forests, child of a long line of loggers. She became a forester herself, one of the few women working in the industry.

Curiosity drove her to make discoveries about how forests work, especially how the fungi are more important than the soil in terms of nitrogen delivery.

One thing becomes clear throughout the book: often the views of the policy-makers, the forestry companies and those actually doing fieldwork don't align. Simard's work became much more widely known when she was published in Nature Magazine in 1997. Nature called it the "wood-wide web," a now familiar expression.

Along with the science, it's the arc of Simard's life - the death of her brother, the birth of her children, breast cancer and misogyny - that weaves the book together creating a compelling read.

A Good War

by Seth Klein

During the Second World War, Canada mobilized the war effort amazingly quickly. Klein points out how the climate crisis needs the kind of action Canadians mustered in the 1930s and '40s.

The parallels are striking: an initial reticence to act; a period of acceptance but with no action; a common crisis to meet, sacrifice for and overcome. There is a lot of fascinating Canadian wartime history here and, taking the lessons learned, Klein sets out a path forward to combatting the climate crisis.

Fiction

The Ministry for the Future

by Kim Stanley Robinson

This compelling novel opens with a disastrous "wet bulb" heat wave that kills most of the inhabitants of a city in India. A new international crisis body is created to protect all living creatures, present and future.

It's called the Ministry for the Future and is led by Mary Murphy, the former foreign minister of Ireland. There may - or may not - be a 'dark ops' contingent attached.

Along with the plot line there is much hard science, economics and speculative military strategy. Occasionally, dialogue even provides some dark comic relief. It's a book that will explain, teach, beguile and infect the reader's imagination. And also provide an avenue of hope.

Creation

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by Katherine Govier

People who enjoy finding and watching birds all share a trait: single-mindedness. Canadian author, Katherine Govier, documents this single-mindedness in her novel about Jean Jacques (a.k.a. John James) Audubon's trip up the coast of Labrador to find the nesting areas of North American birds.

J.J. Audubon is a complex character who is fully aware that when humans enter a scene, they change it. The central paradox of this novel is that for Audubon, the act of creation is also an act of destruction.

Govier's writing is eloquent and she has written an atmospheric and enthralling historical novel. Her epilogue is also intriguing as it poses the question of what is fiction and what are facts. She does list facts for the factually minded among her readers.

Blaze Island

by Catharine Bush

This is both a fast paced and lyrical novel that is set on an island off the coast of Newfoundland (based on Fogo Island).

Climate scientist Milan Wells and his young daughter, Miranda, arrive as U.S. refugees fleeing from death threats and hate mail due to the publication of dire climate modelling vis-a-vis global warming. They set up a life on the island that is as carbon free as possible.

Miranda grows up being very in tune with weather and her natural surroundings. The topography, birds, plants, ocean, wind, rain and snow are beautifully described and are practically characters in the story.

Unbeknownst to Miranda, her father has not given up his climate modelling and secret activism, especially solar geo-engineering.

While this novel can be classed as an eco-thriller, Bush introduces ways of thinking about our predicament and what sacrifices we might need to make to stabilize our world.

Marilyn Freeman is a book reviewer for Peterborough Field Naturalists and former adult educator.

Climate Change Update

Alarm: "Human-induced climate change and the war on Ukraine have the same roots, fossil fuels, and our dependence on them," said Svitlana Krakovska of the Ukrainian Hydrometeorological Institute, as the IPCC unveiled its report on climate impacts. tinyurl.com/5n828hxh

Upcoming Events: March 25, 3:30 p.m.: Global

Climate Strike 2022 (Nogojiwanong/Peterborough)

at Confederation Square across from City Hall.

Organized by the Youth Climate Action Club.

Carbon Dioxide: The atmospheric CO2 reading for the week ending March 12 is 418.51 parts per million (ppm), compared to 417.20 ppm just one year ago. The highest level deemed safe for the planet

is 350 ppm. The steady upward trend in atmospheric CO2 continues: Pre-industrial (280 ppm), 1912 (300), 1988 (350), 2010 (390), 2014 (400) and 2020 (413). Rising CO2 means worsening global heating

and climate chaos ahead.

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